

1.18.2008 - What are you doing for others?

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "We are not makers of history. We are made by history." Each year, we celebrate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with a federal holiday, an honor bestowed only on three other individuals-George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Christopher Columbus-three men who defined our Nation's history.

Dr. King believed that all people are made in God's image and created equal. He dedicated his life to spreading this message and challenged Americans, of all circumstances, to better their communities from within. He broke down barriers in our society by encouraging Americans to look past their differences and unite in the pursuit of equal opportunity for all.

In 1994, my colleagues in Congress and I passed the King Holiday and Service Act, designating the King Holiday as a national day of volunteer service. Instead of a day of rest, we asked Americans of all backgrounds and ages to celebrate Dr. King's legacy with a day of action. Since then, people all across the country have made the federal holiday "a day on, not a day off" with community service projects to honor the memory of this great leader.

The King Day of Service is an opportunity to emphasize the importance of social justice, turn strangers into friends, build up broken communities, and inspire future generations to pursue public service and life-long volunteerism.

Participation in the King Day of Service has grown steadily over the past decade, with hundreds of thousands of Americans each year engaging in projects such as tutoring and mentoring children, painting schools and senior centers, delivering meals, building homes, and reflecting on Dr. King's life and teachings. Many of the projects started on King Day continue to engage volunteers beyond the holiday and impact the community year-round, including those here in southern West Virginia.

This year, the Corporation for National and Community Service awarded a service grant to the Beckley Chapter of the Citizens Conservation Corps of West Virginia (CCCWV) for the 2nd Annual MLK Educational Service Awareness Day at Beckley Elementary School on January 21, 2008.

Beckley-Raleigh County area volunteers of all ages are encouraged to attend and help better their community. Volunteers will help make renovations and improvements to the school library, update school-wide murals, and clean common areas. This is just one of many examples of how southern West Virginians are using the King Day of Service to promote teamwork, instill a sense of civic responsibility, and generate economic opportunity for their community.

As our Nation celebrates Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, we remember him as a beacon of change and hope. Dr. King changed America by showing that injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere. Through his leadership and transcendental appeal, he gave people the hope and courage to promote equality and economic opportunity across America.

Dr. King believed that the government had a fundamental responsibility to meet the needs of its people. He had a vision of an America where economic opportunity was equal and available for all. Dr. King once said, "Life's persistent and most urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" This question is one all Americans should ask themselves each day.

Americans-whether at home or at school, in Congress or in the coal fields-must continue our efforts to bring about equal opportunity for all Americans. I encourage everyone to answer Dr. King's question and honor his legacy by helping others on the King Day of Service.